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A LEGEND OF PORCELAIN

BY AMY LOWELL

Old China sits and broods behind her ten-thousand-miles-great wall,
And the rivers of old China crawl—crawl—forever
Toward the distant, ceaselessly waiting seas.

At King-te-chin in China,
At King-te-chin in the far East of the Eighteen Provinces of China,
Where all day long the porcelain factories belch corded smoke,
And all night long the watch-men, striking the hours on their lizard-
 skin drums,
Follow the shadows thrown before them
From a sky glazed scarlet as it floats over the fires of burning kilns—

At King-te-chin, in the heart of brooding China,
Lives Chou-Kiou,
White as milk in a tazza cup,
Red as a pear-tree just dropping its petals,
Happy as the Spring-faced wind.
Chou-Kiou,
For whom the wild geese break their flight,
And the fishes seek the darkness of the lower waters.
Chou-Kiou,
Apt as a son,
Loved as a son,
More precious to her father than blue earth with stars of silver.
It is Chou-Kiou who paints the fighting crickets
On the egg-shell cups;
Who covers the Wa-wa cups
With little bully boys;
Who sketches Manchu ladies, Tartar ladies,
Chasing crimson butterflies with faint silk fans,
On the slim teapots of young bamboo.
Chou-Kiou,
Bustling all day between the kilns and the warehouses.
A breath of peach-bloom silk
Turning a pathway—
Puff! She is gone,
As a peach-blossom painted on paper
Caught in a corner of the wind.

King-te-chin in the Province of Kiangsi,
 Noblest of the manufactories of porcelain,
 Where, from sunrise to sundown,
 In the narrow streets,
 The porters cry "Way! Way!" for the beautiful dishes
 They carry to the barges,
 The flat barges which nuzzle and nudge the banks of the river Jao
 T'cheou;
 And the strong stevedore coolies grunt
 As they lift the clay bricks quarried in the P'ing-li mountains
 Out of the sharp-prowed boats moored along the river Ki-muen.
 Mêng Tsung, master of a thousand workmen,
 Walks under the red eaves of his buildings
 In the tea-green shadow of the willow-trees,
 Contemplating his bakers, his mixers, his painters,
 The men who carry tcha wood,
 And those, nicer-fingered, who turn the shaping wheels.
 He walks among the beehive furnaces,
 And his nostrils smart with the sharp scent of ashes,
 And his ears rattle with the crackle of a hundred flames.
 Mêng Tsung, finest of the porcelain-makers of King-te-chin.

In China,
 Old China,
 What other artists do is his work also:
 Does Lu Tzu Kang work in jade; the porcelains of Mêng Tsung are
 ice and rainbows.
 What Chu Pi-shan can do in silver,
 What Hsiao-hsi in carnelian,
 Pao T'ien-ch'êng in rhinoceros horn,
 P'u Chung-ch'ien in carved bamboo,
 Chang Ch'ien-li in mother-of-pearl,
 All this is nothing.
 The bowls of Mêng Tsung are like Spring sun on a rippled river,
 Like willow leaves seen over late ice,
 Like bronze bells one hour before sunset.
 They are light as the eggs of the yellow-eyebrowed thrush,
 And wonderful in colour as the green grapes of Turkestan.
 Mêng Tsung walks under the red eaves of his buildings,
 Musing on the beauty of old, old China,
 Listening to the dull beating of the fish-drums in the monastery on the
 hill calling the attention of God to the prayers of his monks.

Beautiful the sun of China,
 Beautiful the squares of flooded rice-fields,
 The long slopes of tea-plants on the hills of Ning-po,
 The grey mulberry-trees of Chuki.
 Beautiful the cities between the rivers,
 But three, and three, and three times more beautiful
 The porcelains fashioned by Chou-Kiou.
 See them in the sun,
 Swept over by the blowing shade of willows,

Moulded like lotus-leaves,
Yellow as the skins of eels,
Black glaze overlaid with gold.
Tell the story of this porcelain
With veins like arbor-vitæ leaves and bullock's hair,
Mottled as hare's fur,
Bright and various as the wooded walls of mountains.
Here are the dawn-red wine-cups,
And the cups of snow-blue with no glisten;
Little vases, barely taller than a toad,
And great three-part vases shining slowly like tarnished silver.
They stand in rows along the flat board
And she checks them, one by one, on a tablet of fir-flower paper,
And her eyes are little copper bells fallen in the midst of tall grass.
Tell the tale of these great jars,
Cloudy coloured as the crystal grape
With white bloom of rice dust upon them,
Fallen over at the top by pointed bunches
Of the myriad-year wistaria.
Those smaller jars of moonlight enamel, dark and pale,
With undulating lines which seem to change.
Pots green as growing plants are green,
Marked with the hundred-fold crackle of broken ice.
Pallets painted blue with dragons,
And ample dishes, redder than fresh blood,
Spotted with crabs' claws,
Splashed with bluish flames of fire.
Here are bowls faintly tinted as tea-dust
Or the fading leaf of the camphor-tree in Autumn;
Others as bamboo paper for thickness,
Lightly spattered with vermilion fishes;
And white bowls
Surpassing hoar-frost and the pointed tips of icicles.
There are birds painted thinly in dull reds,
Fighting-cocks with rose-pink legs and crests of silver,
Teapots rough as the skin of the Kio orange, or blistered with the
little flower-buds of the Tsong-tree.
How tell the carminates,
The greens of pale copper,
The leopard-spotted yellows,
The blues, powdered and indefinite as a Mei plum!
Globular bodies with bulbous mouths;
Slim, long porcelains confused like a weedy sea;
Porcelains, pale as the morning sky
Fluttered with purple wings of finches;
High-footed cups for green wine,
And incense-burners yellow as old Llama books
With cranes upon them.
Blue porcelain for the Altar of Heaven,
Yellow for the Altar of Earth,
Red for the Altar of the Sun,

White for the Altar of the Year-star.
 All these Chou-Kiou sets down on her fir-flower tablet,
 Then carefully, carefully, selects a cup,
 Of so keen a transparence that the sun, passing it, can scarcely mark
 a shadow,
 And fills it with pale water.
 Oh! The purple fishes!
 The dark-coloured fishes with scales of silver!
 The blue-black fishes swerving in a trail of gold!
 They move and flicker,
 They swing in procession,
 They dart, and hesitate, and float
 With flower-waving tails—
 The vase is empty again,
 Smooth and open and colourless.
 The tally is finished,
 The sun is sinking in a rose-green sky,
 And in the guard-house down the road
 The red tallow candles are lighted.

It is the fifth day of the fifth month,
 And all the demons of old China
 Are chattering down from the mountains of the North.
 Little Chou-Kiou,
 Where are the spears of the sweet-flag
 You should have gathered yesterday
 And nailed to the door-lintel at the first flow of morning?
 Little Chou-Kiou,
 It is too late,
 The guards have clanged the Dragon Gate.
 Flags do not grow in this trodden city,
 Demons laugh at the studded walls of men.
 You dream of your betrothed,
 As you roll your tablet,
 Your lover sailing the sharp seas,
 Your lover of the tall junks
 Trading up and down the coast
 Glad when the two eyes of his ship
 Are turned again to China.
 Silly Chou-Kiou,
 Absorbed by love and dishes,
 Forgetting the evil spirits
 Descending from the curled blue mountains.

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Open the Gate,
 Open the Gate,
 His Lordship T'ang Ling
 High official to the Emperor
 Waits without the walls.
 Hurry, Guards,
 The sun is red,

The gate already casts a shadow.
T'ang Ling is come
To visit the porcelain factories
Of King-te-chin.
Click! Click!—loud and imperious!
It is the mandarin's outrunners,
And the rods they are carrying and striking on the ground.
Clash,
Clash,
Gongs.
Feet of men in the clouded dust,
Whipping banners scarlet and gold,
Tablet-bearers carrying his scrolls:
All of his titles,
All of his greatness,
All of his honours,
Who were his fathers,
Grim, dim, warriors,
Poems and speeches.
Pass,
Pass,
Golden the heels of the men of T'ang Ling.
Here is one staggering,
Mightily flaunting,
The heavy, flat, superb umbrella!
Spreading crimson as a lotus,
Frozen sun-disk,
Carried high before him.
Clatter! Trip! Clatter! Clatter!
See the caparisoned horses
Glittering and kicking—
How lightly ride the men of T'ang Ling!
They bear the moon fans before his face,
Honourable gentleman.
They raise the golden melon mace.
They have bamboos for the contumacious,
And chains for persons who resist the God-like will.
A space,
Rifting the procession—
Then a bright and massive thing:
His Chair!
Gold thunder carvings,
Mighty lines and fallen spirals,
Dazzling as the sun on cannon,
And he, the Proud One, T'ang Ling,
With his sapphire button,
And the plaques of his coat embroidered with one-eyed peacock's
feathers.
Play Ch'ang flutes before him,
Make a loud music of cymbals,
Pluck sharply on the three-stringed guitars,

Prostrate yourselves,
And beat the snake-skin drums.
K'otow, Mêng Tsung,
Walk backwards past the beehive furnaces,
T'ang Ling, servant of the Yellow Emperor,
Has come to inspect the porcelain.

You must stay in the Eastern Pavilion,
Chou-Kiou,
Hiding and peeking behind the amethyst flowers of the peonies.
But do not forget the sweet-flag
Which you did not hang upon the door.

Tea appears red in white Hsing-chou porcelain,
How strange then to offer such to an official.
When T'ang Ling came to visit Mêng Tsung
They sat under a cinnamon-tree
Examining the "Pieces of a Thousand Flowers."
Coiling-dragon tea is best in black cups,
And silver vessels hold the gosling-down wine.
Lychees and finger citrons
Delight the palate of the great man,
And flat-land ginger, soft and tender to the taste;
But candied melon-rind calls for more wine.
One hundred cups is nothing to so high an officer.
Already his fingers stray in vague tappings
Among the samples of porcelain.
A dragon bowl, seven days fired, for the Palace.
What is T'ang Ling doing with the sword—
Does he dream of the campaigns of his youth,
Whirling it voraciously before him?
His sword is tempered to an edge of flame,
It cleaves the dragon bowl without a splinter.
Chou-Kiou,
Chou-Kiou,
Was the river so far that you could not reach it yesterday before the
twilight fell?
The flags which you did not pick must spear your heart.

A diamond-marked python scuttles away under the potting-shed,
But every one knows that evil spirits take many forms.

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Drive,
Frosty sea,
Against the high beak of this junk,
Cover the painted eyes with foam.
Kuan-Yin, Goddess of sailors,
Care for this man;
Even in remembering, his betrothed has forgotten him.
It will be long—long—
Before they sit together gazing at the flowery candles.

Pirate junks make bitter waiting.
The moon above the potting-sheds is cold.

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Disaster,
A great plague of disaster,
Fallen upon the factory of Mêng Tsung.
Evil spirits in clay, in water, in fire.
The clay weakens in the potter's grasp
And falls to powder on the wheel.
When the furnaces are opened,
The lovely-shaped vessels
Are run into flakes of cream
At the bottom of the seggars.
The tcha wood,
The strong, horned tcha wood,
Crisp, brittle, dried to the very bite of fire,
Hewn perfectly,
Split to an even thickness,
Piled with meticulous care by the circular pilers—
The tcha wood dies under the touch of the lighters,
It crackles as though each pore seeped water;
And the men who carry it to the ovens
Swear at the splinters buried in their flesh.
Cinnabar vases bake an acrid chrome,
Blue glaze gutters into thorns of yellow,
Fox fingers smear the delicately etched designs.
Have the P'ei-se-kong, the colour-mixers, gone mad?
The pound—pound—of their pestles seems louder than usual.
No—pestles do not strike with such a clang:
Devil gongs beat on the roof-tiles,
Devil bells tinkle at the windows,
A bloody moon casts an ape's shadow
On the open space before the warehouse door.
There is a wailing of gibbons in the willow-trees,
But gibbons do not live in the populous city of King-te-chin.

In twos, in threes, in companies,
The servants of the factory slink away.
Chou-Kiou weeps at her painting,
For the junk with the watching eyes is desperately overdue.

Foxes dance by night in dim, old China,
And the agent of the Emperor demands the delivery of the Palace
bowls.

Mêng Tsung is a crazy man,
He nods his head and claps his hands,
He sits and plays a game of chess
In a staring, stuttering idleness.
Swallows build in the eye-holes of his kilns.

See her pick her way up the stony path,
 Her little feet, small as the quarters of a sweet orange,
 Bear her sadly over the roughness.
 The stars hang out of the sky like lotus-seeds,
 It is the third watch, and the city gates are shut.
 Taoist priests know many things,
 And folk bewitched say nothing of difficulties.

The whine of an owl trembles along the darkness.
 She runs,
 Flinging her heart forward,
 Reaching to it,
 Floundering.

"We need light," says the Taoist priest,
 And he cuts a bit of paper round like the moon
 And hangs it on the wall.
 And it is the moon,
 Smoothly shining,
 Silver and lesser silver,
 Hanging from a pin.
 He steps into the moon to think,
 And she sees him drinking rice-wine
 And slowly writing on a tablet.
 The room is filled with the larkspur scent of ink.

The priest steps down from the paper moon.
 He reads from a scroll,
 Droning the words,
 Teetering back and forth on wide, horny feet:

"The protection of the sweet-flag has been dishonourably neglected.
 Chou-Kiou, accursed woman, following the toys of this present life,
 has hardened her mind to the teaching of the ages.
 She, daughter of Mêng Tsung, greatest of those who work in porcelain,
 Has strayed from the path of her most respected ancestors.
 Thinking of love, she forgot filial piety;
 Snared by beauty, she permitted her august father's house to go
 unguarded.
 Now a fox has entered the body of her most directly-to-be-com-
 miserated father,
 While he by whom she was truly begot lies bound in the cave of the
 Tiger-peaked mountain.
 Weary, weary, the way of an arrogant heart,
 Sad, and beyond sadness, the lot of Chou-Kiou.
 With her white hands she must labour,
 With her 'golden lily' feet she must stumble under terrific burdens.
 The breath of her mouth must coax the flame to enter wet wood,
 She must sear and burn before the hot furnaces,
 And waking many nights and days produce in agony a bowl
 'Bright as a mirror, blue as the sky, thin as paper, sweet-sounding to
 the touch as camphor-jade.'"

China!

China!

The voice of Chou-Kiou is very small,

Her eyes are pale,

Her limbs stiff as frozen thorns:

"And if I do this thing,

What of him, Wu, my betrothed?"

"The scroll is written," said the Taoist priest.

The Gods are many and confused in old, dim China.

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Morning leaping from the rims of the mountains;

Darkness leaning farther and farther over a descending sun.

Clouds bring rain,

And winds dry the pools of it.

The North-west wind whirls dust over the willow-trees;

Wild duck and teal cross and re-cross King-te-chin

In search of water,

And the hurry of their wings

Is the rush of the Northern monsoon

Sweeping the gulf of Tonkin.

Chou-Kiou pounds the blue clay,

Kneading it with effort to its finest granules.

Days and Days—

The smartweed reddens on the river shoals;

Eye-fruit and pears are dropping in the gardens;

Floating elm-leaves gild running water;

The pinnacles of the Dragon Mountains are clear above red mist.

Chou-Kiou paints a crane and two mandarin ducks

Under a persimmon-tree,

She dips the jar, and poises it,

But her ears are full of the heavy sound of the sea.

Cold winds,

Long Autumn.

"Leaves touched by frost are redder than flowers of the second moon."

How drag the great wood,

How build it into a circle of fire,

Waveringly uncertain on the "golden lily" feet?

Shêng! Shêng! The water-clock marks an hour which has gone.

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The wind is sad, blowing ceaselessly from the clear stars,

The lamp-flower flickers and dies down.

Is her shadow some one?

Is she, perhaps, not alone?

She raises the bamboo blind,

Snow is falling,

The branches of the Winter plum-tree

Glitter like jade hairpins against a white sky.

Brooms brush little snow,
 Her fox father laughs and rattles his chess-men.
 Chou-Kiou,
 Bones under frosty water
 Bleach as white as the jade-coloured branches of the plum-tree:
 You remember now,
 Sweeping from dawn till evening
 A pathway to the kilns.

She has blown upon the fire and kindled it,
 She has set her fragile bowl in the midst of the flame.
 She lifts her eyes from the red fire
 For green Spring is like smoke in the willow-trees.
 The rivers run flooding over the wharves of King-te-chin.
 She hears the porters shouting: "Way! Way!"
 In the streets, going up and down from the boats.
 But about her is only the harsh sound of fire,
 And a crow calling: "Ka! Ka! Ka!"
 In a mulberry-tree.

Ashes of fire,
 Ashes of the days of the World!
 If failure, then another long beginning.
 Why hope,
 Why think that Spring must bring relenting.
 Oh, man of this woman,
 Where on all the Spring-flown oceans
 Is your junk?
 Where your heart that you cannot hear the cuckoos calling from the
 fir woods of the Golden Yoke Cliff?
 China blossoms above her sea-beaches,
 Her trees break budding to an early sun,
 Foot-boats fly along the blue rivers,
 But Chou-Kiou sobs as brick by brick she opens the cooled kiln.

Oh, marvel of lightness!
 Oh, colour hidden and all at once emphatically clear!
 Like a bright moon carved in ice,
 Green as the thousand peaks,
 Blue as the sky after rain,
 Violet as the skin of an egg-plant fruit,
 Then once again white,
 White as the "secretly-smiling" magnolia,
 And singing a note when struck
 Sharp and full as all the hundred and fifty bells
 On the Porcelain Tower of Nankin.

This bowl is worth one hundred taels of silver.
 Pour in the black dragon tea,
 Plucked in April before the Spring rains,
 This shall be a libation to Kuan-Yin,

Goddess of Mercy.

Chou-Kiou has no wine.

Fragrant Goddess, despise not the yellow tea.

But the tea bubbles,

It moves like waves in a short bay,

It tumbles with a glitter of rainbows.

Wing-flare widening out of the cup—

The great crane sweeps into the air.

He circles round Chou-Kiou,

Circles, circles—

With him are the mandarin ducks.

The air is dark with wings,

It is bright with the clipping and cutting

Of quickly-flickered wings.

In a whirl of wind,

Something comes twirling and dazzling out of the house,

Flapping in plum-coloured silks,

Confusing with motion,

Blurred,

Without contour.

It is a man—

It is a bit of paper—

It is a bamboo-silk cocoon—

It blows, turning—turning—toward the bowl,

It is blown into the bowl—

The tea is red,

It leaps, water-spouting, into the air.

It soars over the red roof-tiles,

It glitters like a pagoda hot with lamps,

And then descends,

Sucking, into the bowl,

Sucking, out of the bowl,

Disappearing where there is no hole.

It is a beautiful piece,

With white and grey peonies and yellow persimmons.

There are no birds, only flowers,

Starting in a chord of colours out of violet haze.

Chou-Kiou has fainted,

She does not hear Mêng Tsung

Calling to her from the Terrace of the Peach-Trees.

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I read this tale in the "Azure Sky Bookshop," in the ninth month of the sixth year of To Kwong.

When I had reached this point, the shadow of a thirty-two-paper kite fell upon my page, and raising my eyes to the sky the whiteness of the sun dazzled me, and I inadvertently turned over the leaves of the book.

How many I turned, I do not know, but when I could see again after the blindness of the sky I read at once, not daring to go back for the leaf of the story upon which I had fallen—

" Pity, pity me,
For my flesh cries night and morning ;
The darkness hears me,
And the tongues of the darkness babble back his name.
I am eager and thwarted.
Daughter I am,
And as a daughter, I have given my brain and my body
To restore my father's house.
Alone, with bleeding feet and frozen hands,
I have lifted the curse fallen upon my people ;
I have toiled without sleep
Until the sight of my eyes was broken.
Hungering for days, chattering with cold and sorrow,
I have not suffered my heart to weaken.
My prayers have risen incessantly to the thirty-three Heavens,
All powerful Goddess, you have regarded me,
And taken me under your protection.
I am a worm,
Spurning the mulberry leaf to cry upon the moon.
Holy Kuan-Yin, of the thousand eyes, and the thousand arms, and the
merciful heart,
I beseech a farther clemency.
You, who answer the longings of the sterile,
Do not mock me with a half-completed pardon.
Daughter I am, Kuan-Yin,
But I am also a woman.
I love as women here in China must not,
But as you know very well they must and do.
Glory has once more entered into my father's heart,
All day he watches his men.
He weighs the precious blue earth and numbers it.
He oversees the lame men who knead the clay,
He praises and chides the painters,
And rises in the night to superintend the firers.
King-te-chin hums like a hive at swarming time
Between its rivers,
And this is the loudest of all the factories of King-te-chin.
Only I am desolate,
I am as the shadow of a bamboo upon bleached sand,
My eyes are black and colourless seeking the boats on the long canals,
My ears rattle waiting for the sharp sound of a voice at the gate.
Once more I will work, Kuan-Yin,
I will use all my skill to honour you.
I will fashion you in such a manner that your eyes will laugh to see it.
I will make a figure of you in fine silk porcelain
And set it in the temple where all can see,
And, looking, their hearts will be to you as coral beads on a string of
white gold
For your hands' stretching,
And for an ornament upon your breast forever."

Then Chou-Kiou tightened her willow-coloured girdle
 And sat down to the modelling board.
 And on the fifteenth day the figure was completed,
 Not entirely to Chou-Kiou's dissatisfaction,
 Underneath it she wrote: "Made at the Brilliant Colours Hall."
 And again: "Reverentially made by Chou-Kiou, daughter of Mêng
 Tsung, Captain of the Banner promoted four honorary grades, also
 Director of a Porcelain Manufactory at King-te-chin in the
 Province of Kiangsi: and presented by her to the Temple of the
 Holy God of Heaven to remain through everlasting time as an
 offering of a grateful heart and as a glory in the eyes of men: on a
 fortunate day in the Spring of the 6th year of the reign of the
 Emperor Ch'ien-lung."

For days she paints it,
 Rubbing the gold with garlic-bulbs
 To fix its lustre.
 Laying copper-foil about it to heighten the colour,
 Setting it with careful blue:
 The blue of little stones,
 The blue of the precious stone Mei-Kouei-tse-yeou,
 The blue of the head of Buddha.
 She dreams of beauty,
 And the face of the figure is lovely as her dreams;
 But has it not been written: "It is useless to cast a net to catch the
 image of the moon."

Night over China,
 Night over old, distant China,
 Dark night over the city of King-te-chin.
 Chou-Kiou,
 Chou-Kiou,
 Your eyes are red watching the flames of a furnace,
 And the great shield of wood you hold
 Scarcely protects you from the bursting heat of the kiln.
 For three days and three nights
 You have tended a flowing fire;
 For two days and two nights
 You have watched before a fierce fire;
 Now the seggar is red and passing into a white heat,
 It is bright in front and behind.
 At cock-crow you will stop the fire,
 But to-night you watch,
 And your eyes are salt
 As though you stood before the sea.
 A wind teases the willow-trees,
 They rustle,
 And fling the moonlight from them like spray.

And then snow fell from the midst of the moon.
 The flakes were like willow-flowers,

They drifted down slowly,
 And the brilliance of the moon struck upon them as they fell
 So that all the air was flowing with silver,
 And walking in the arc of it was a woman
 Who cast a whip-like shadow before her
 From the brightness of the snow and the white, round moon.

All the flowers bend toward her,
 The grass by the ring-fence lies horizontally to reach her,
 She moves with the movement of wind over water,
 And it is no longer the moon which casts her shadow
 But she who sets shadows curving outward
 From the pebbles at her feet.
 Her dress is Ch'ing-green playing into scarlet,
 Embroidered with the hundred cheous;
 The hem is a slow delight of gold, the faded, beautiful gold of temple
 carvings;
 In her hair is a lotus,
 Red as the sun after rain.
 She comes softly—softly—
 And the tinkle of her ornaments
 Jars the smooth falling of the snow
 So that it breaks into jagged lightnings
 Which form about her the characters of her holy name:
 Kuan-Yin, Goddess of Mercy, of Sailors, of all who know sorrow and
 grief in bitterness.

Ochre-red sails are dark in moonlight,
 But the red heart of man is like a water-clock dripping the hours;
 Lost days weigh many ounces of silver,
 But green spring is worth blood and gold.

Snow ceases falling,
 Moonlight is no longer broken, but a single piece.
 Her eyebrows are fine as the edge of distant mountains,
 Her eyes are clear as the T'ung-T'ing lake in Autumn,
 Her face is sweet as almond-flowers in a wind.
 The breath of her passing is cool,
 Her gesture is a plum-blossom waving.
 She mounts the step
 And looks into the eye-hole of the kiln.
 One—two—three, the pulse of Chou-Kiou,
 Beating to a given time, like music.
 The coals of the fire are not fierce now
 But gentle,
 They lie in the form of roses
 And the scent of them is the urgent scent of musk.

A watchman calls the hour
 And strikes on his bamboo drum.
 The moon fades down a long green sky.
 There is no one on the step,

No flight of silks down the pathway,
 Chou-Kiou sickens to a weariness which eats her bones.
 She rakes the scattered embers.
 The firing is done.

Spring day,
 How sharp the pheasants' cry,
 Like metal!
 This year the bamboo flowers,
 This year the many-petalled peonies
 Are large as rising moons.
 The men of the "Brilliant Coloured Factory" stand
 In their blue jackets,
 In their dark-purple silk jackets,
 In a curve like the bow moon,
 Watching Chou-Kiou advancing to the furnace.
 And Mêng Tsung stands,
 Fearfully watching.
 No one must touch,
 No one must caution,
 No one must pray.
 It is between Chou-Kiou and the Gods.
 How do her ancestors in the thirty-three Heavens?
 Do they watch?
 Do they listen?
 Do they desire and remain silent?
 Ten times round her hands
 The cloth is wrapped.
 Yet will they be blistered—
 But it is cool!
 Cold!
 And the seggar falls apart without a touch.

Fragrant Goddess,
 Whose heart is of snow and rubies,
 Is this the figure made by Chou-Kiou?
 Not so, certainly.
 Slimmer,
 Lovelier,
 More quaintly golden.
 This face is clouds and flowers,
 These eyes are wind and flame,
 This body is jade and silver.
 Her dress is the smoky green of autumn lakes
 Flashed and tinted to immediate scarlet,
 It is embroidered with the hundred cheous.
 Poised is this figure,
 Balanced like a music
 Of flageolets and harps under the Dawn.
 Men cover their faces,
 Here is a beauty to turn the dart of arrows.

But Chou-Kiou's figure was single,
 This is triplicate.
 Attendants guard the dazzling Goddess.
 One (who dares to see it!) Chou-Kiou,
 In her peach-bloom dress with the willow-coloured girdle,
 And clasped and cherished in her hands
 The sacred peach.
 The other is a man,
 Blue-dressed as in running waves,
 Bronze and crimson with the rake of the sea.
 The gate-keepers shout his name,
 Swift are his steps,
 Like songs for gladness
 His footsteps,
 He is a straight shaft of sapphire,
 He is a peacock feather borne upon a spear.

He and she before the Goddess,
 Heads in the dust.
 Not alone do the bamboos flower;
 Here are blossoms and fruit.
 Kuan-Yin, Goddess of Mercy, of Sailors, of Sterile Women,
 For what they pray let them have full answer:
 Guide them as with a torch,
 Scatter snow and heat like the cool of the moon,
 Defend them against enemies as a moat or a city,
 Save them in danger as a father or mother,
 Quicken them as rain and sun,
 Bless the seed of this man as corn under a rich sun,
 Bless the womb of this woman as fishes are blessed by the sea.

Then the multitude rose up
 And proclaimed them mighty.
 They placed her in the scarlet palanquin
 And brought her before him.
 They lit the flower candles;
 With painted lanterns in broad daylight they lined the roads.
 Drums and musicians played forever,
 And fireworks blazed in the heart of the sky.
 So the day fell
 And the night came,
 And the lizard-skin drums struck midnight,
 And the marriage was accomplished.
 Sweetly the moon slept in the willow-trees,
 And the man and the woman slept under the green eyelids of the Dawn.

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When I finished the book, night had come.
 I could not part with it, so I bought it for two ounces of silver.
 Did I overprize it, do you think?
 It is only a tale of old, dead China.

AMY LOWELL.